



The Urban Ecology NEWSLETTER

Vol 11 No3 (#78) August 2012

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Convenor's Report August 2012

Over the last few months the board of Urban Ecology has been looking at what we do, how we do it and what it costs us. The intent is to streamline what we do, where possible so we can focus on our broad aims. The tours have increased and more people have been through this year than in previous years. This is positive but it increases the administrative work load, some of which is paid hours but there are still many hours of voluntary time.

We commissioned Carolyn Brown to undertake a marketing plan which she has submitted to the board for comment. Carolyn has also taken on the tour guide management.

We are still getting lots of hits on [facebook](https://www.facebook.com/urbanecology), the latest weekly summary is below:

New Likes	Talking About This	Weekly Total Reach
8	35	1,794

Many of the Christie Walk community will have met our intern, PhD candidate Liam Cooper who has undertaken numerous interviews. He will be back in Adelaide in September to finish collecting data. We hope to provide a summary

of his findings in the next Urban Ecology Australia newsletter.

See also page 6 for information about [Transition to Resilience, T2R](#).

[Ed] In a similar vein to Liam's work, WestWyck in Brunswick, Victoria two years ago had a survey undertaken by a French intern Victor Zylberberg "Understanding How Behaviour Is Affected Within WestWyck Eco-Village". The survey was undertaken in order to understand the different mechanism allowing WestWyck and WestWyckians to be models for urban ecology and sustainable development. This report concluded: it is fundamental to understand that behaviour change is a question of process, a combination of different factors and should not be intended as a mechanical result following the implementation of a sustainable development. As this survey showed it, behaviour change has happened and is happening at WestWyck.

Biodiversity in the city



Letters and feedback about the newsletter

By way of introduction, my name is Tom Livanos. I reside in Armidale, which is on the Northern Tablelands of New South Wales. I am a member of the voluntary group **Sustainable Living Armidale**. You may visit the website at <http://slaati.org>
Note: slaati stands for Sustainable Living Armidale - A Transition Initiative.

My aim in writing this email to you is to provide feedback on the newsletter, most of which I have now read. Note that it is the first newsletter which I have received from Urban Ecology Australia. In the interests of clarity, my hope in writing this email is that my words will be considered.

1. The first point of feedback - and the point I would consider most obvious - is that a considerable number of acronyms are used. In general terms, I presume that your aim in distributing the newsletter is to inform, educate, perhaps entertain etc. Acronyms do none of these things and I, for one, am most turned off by the use of acronyms...

2. The second point of feedback is that I found the newsletter to be informative. That said, my personal view is that too much focus is being placed on climate change. I do consider climate change to be important but it seems to me that it is receiving attention which is so high that it is detracting from many other components of sustainability which need to be met. They include:

- The sheer lack of knowledge related to the number of species on the planet and their role within the web of life;
- Damage being caused to the soil - especially the Earth's oldest soil which is in Australia - and how that damage may be impacting on us directly rather than via the impacts it has in the atmosphere;
- Damage caused to our water courses and the oceans which are more direct than how they are interacting with the atmosphere; and
- A considerable number of other issues.

It seems to me that even academics feel that - unless they can link an issue directly to climate change - it will not be considered. As I read it, this is reflected in the newsletter which you have just released. I do admit though that it is the first one I am reading. By giving this attention to climate change, it may

well be that you are re-inforcing a distortion which I, again for one, believe is taking place in the present day world.

3. Thirdly, the format of your section 'Some websites for your interest' is rather difficult to follow. The bullet points are the only feature which keep everything consistent. Some websites are listed at the end of the bullet point, some at the beginning. Some have a very brief description, others have more detail. It is a section which seems to operate on the 'the more you put in, the better will be the result'. This is not true. The section could be greater improved if:

The website/web page could be listed in the same spot each time, my vote would be at the beginning;

More detail than, for example "Debunking the Peak Oil Debunkers", was provided. The website connected to that particular piece is *evworld*, another acronym. It leaves me knowing less than before I had read it. It may be appropriate for a website because it can sometimes be easier to remember if it has been properly introduced. This creates all the more reason why some review or at least a general description needs to be provided.

4. Finally, I wish to write to you regarding the length of the newsletter and the perceived purpose it has. I ask you if any surveys have been done by Urban Ecology on what readers to your newsletter wish to see in it. Seven pages every two months is quite considerable in my view if the newsletter has been going for 77 issues. I ordered the multimedia package to learn about building sustainability and community living. What needs to be considered in building sustainability? What methods, materials etc. have been developed to be able to build sustainably? What have people experienced in terms of social sustainability and conflict resolution? A newsletter which provides information on these items would be of more value to me than a loose conglomeration of book reviews and articles, irrespective of whether they are popular or not.

Overall, I am quite pleased to have come across Christie Walk, the multimedia package and your newsletter service. Thanking you. Thank-you.

Thank-you and regards,
Tom.

[Ed: We were very pleased to get this feedback from Tom, and his comments helped the Urban Ecology Australia (UEA) Board to decide to send out a survey to get feedback from those who receive the UEA newsletter. We edited the above letter for space reasons.]

A letter from another reader

Thanks for the latest newsletter. In regards to the question about format, I think it's a nice 'digestible' PDF that gets the main issues across quickly & well, while presenting a few things in a bit more depth too.

A couple of quick comments from a now Victorian-based supporter of UEA:

* There was a recent article on 'The Conversation' website talking about urban form, density etc and relation to lifetime carbon emissions by researcher Jago Dodson, at Griffith Uni <https://theconversation.edu.au/the-carbon-devil-in-the-detail-on-urban-density-4226>

You'll notice that yours truly made a comment about Christie Walk and linked to the website ; very disappointing to me that this kind of possibility isn't yet getting attention (from) mainstream urban academic researchers, including in SA!

* I'm now doing a PhD at UniMelb in urban planning, and several of the international student visitors here are also working on urban form, energy and climate, so (I have) been letting them know about UEA and Christie Walk too.

cheers,
Patrick Sunter.

Some snippets from journals and newspapers

From *Urban Policy and Research* Volume 27, Issue 4, 2009

Buildings in cities and the activities carried out therein use a significant proportion of a nation's energy consumption and produce substantial quantities of greenhouse gases in the process. Residential buildings are a large contributor, partially as a result of the transport and housing activities of households. In this study, life cycle analysis is used to calculate the total transport and housing energy and emissions from a sample of 41 households in apartment buildings in the city centre of Adelaide, Australia and compare them with suburban households.

From *The Guardian Weekly* 10/08/12

Rooftop Fish Farms

Urban populations are increasing worldwide; half the global population are city dwellers and this will increase to nearly 70% by 2050. A project in Germany is experimenting with a resource friendly way of providing food for urban populations. Fish tanks are being put on the rooftops and the waste products from these are being used to grow vegetables. This project could also go some way towards addressing the problem of overfishing of the oceans and the food miles involved in supplying city dwellers.

From *The Conversation* 21 Nov 2011

How dense could we be? Very, if you follow much of the commentary in Australian debates about the way we should plan our cities.

High-rise residential developments have been springing up in all Australia's major cities. The view that carbon constraint, ecological protection and liveability can only be achieved by remodeling our cities at high-rise densities has taken root among much of Australia's policy intelligentsia. This view is inconveniently flawed.



Most people agree climate change should be understood through robust scientific evidence. Such a standard should also apply to measures to reduce the climate impact of our cities.

Unfortunately a simple formula equating high-rise urbanism with low carbon or ecological impact finds at best partial confirmation in the scientific literature....

Take the heat off power bills!!

An article in *The Advertiser* (Adelaide's daily paper) on 16/8/12 indicates that households are stocking up on hot water bottles, heavy blankets and door stoppers in an attempt to keep warm without using so much electricity. Soaring prices have encouraged this move. Sales of clothes airing racks as an alternative to electric dryers have seen a rise of 41 percent.

From *Indaily*

A sense of community is vital!

Paul Downton told the SA Council of Social Services annual conference in Adelaide that a sense of community and good relationships with the neighbours was vital for personal health and happiness.

Downton, the architect behind the city urban precinct Christie Walk, said that increasing urban sprawl was leading to the loss of a sense of community.

"Are we losing our communities in the suburbs? The answer is yes," he told the conference.

"Western democracies have got this post-war sprawl approach to building, which Adelaide suffers from enormously.

"And there are intrinsic, inherent problems with that way of building which come to the surface when other things start to break down.

"If the transport breaks down, the energy gets expensive, then everywhere is really a long way from everywhere else.

"It's very hard to get any sense of community when you don't happen on people - you actually have to make an effort to go see them."

Downton's particular bugbear is the *motor vehicle, which he terms "poisonous guided missiles"*.

Roads had come to dominate communities, he said, replacing useable open space with tarmacs that carried dangerous objects.

"Our built environment often fails to support community and often actively works against the development of community.

"Not least through having communities which are criss-crossed with roads carrying poisonous guided missiles."

Downton called for developers to incorporate community development principles into the built environment.

Buildings shouldn't be any higher than five stories – the maximum height from which someone on the top floor could call down to someone on the ground.

Developments should have shared open spaces like parks and barbeques to draw residents together, allowing relationships to form.

"Those really simple devices where people can happily and comfortably meet and have the exchanges which is the basis of community.

"The way we build can't guarantee community outcomes. But you can build in such a way that you make community easier to experience and develop.

"Too often in modern architecture this is an aspect of design that is neglected.

"If you've got a really bad physical environment then no matter how much effort you put in to it from a community development perspective, you're banging your head against the wall."

The deep pain of loneliness which is pervasive and reportedly on the increase in cities

Alan Stewart, PhD

Here are recent commentaries on this phenomenon which you may find of interest in relation to what is vital in adapting cities for wholesome civic life.

Loneliness – Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection. John Cacioppo and William Patrick (2009)

Prof John Cacioppo of the University of Chicago is credited with pioneering 'the new science of loneliness.' In this book he reports:

"The data tell us that loneliness seriously accelerates age-related declines in health and well-being, yet the idea of promoting connections is rarely discussed alongside the heated issues of the cost of pharmaceuticals and other medical interventions necessary to deal with an increasingly lonely, isolated and ageing population."

Says a commentator on this work, science writer Greg Miller, 'Cacioppo studies the biological effects of loneliness, and in a steady stream of recent papers, he and collaborators have identified several potentially unhealthy changes in the cardiovascular, immune, and nervous systems of chronically lonely people. Their findings could help explain why epidemiological studies have often found that socially isolated people have shorter life spans and increased risk of a host of health problems, including infections, heart disease, and depression. Their work also adds a new wrinkle, suggesting that it's the subjective experience of loneliness that's harmful, not the actual number of social contacts a person has. "Loneliness isn't at all what people thought it was, and it's a lot more important than people thought it was."

Source: *Why Loneliness is Hazardous to your Health.* Science 14 January 2011: Vol. 331 no. 6014 pp. 138-140. Author: Greg Miller.



Would you ever see your fellow residents?

Swanston Street Melbourne encourages cyclists and walkers



Social Cities

<http://grattan.edu.au/publications/reports/post/social-cities/>

A report by the Grattan Institute in Melbourne entitled **Social Cities** suggests that: "Humans are social animals: relationships are critical to our wellbeing."

And indicates that "Isolation and loneliness pose an increasing threat to the health of Australians, many of whom are cut off from friends and locals by ill-conceived urban design.

... "although social networks are better in Australia than many countries, friendships and neighbourhood connections have diminished over the past two decades, and the changing population means these trends could worsen.

"A lack of face-to-face contact can put our health at risk."

And that "Unfortunately, there are worrying signs that isolation and loneliness are growing in Australia." Furthermore, that the very nature of urban design exacerbates the lack of opportunity for face to face social contact. For much of the design of dwellings, in urban and suburban settings (often with electronically controlled roller doors), means few means by which people 'bump into' others in the course of their everyday lives.

In a commentary on the Social Cities report the statement is made: "Without relationships we wither – individually and collectively," says the report, "It's now recognised that loneliness is up there with high blood pressure, lack of exercise, obesity, and smoking as an indicator of shortened life expectancy."

In The Field - Social Cities panel investigates some hard facts on loneliness and isolation.

By Design on Radio National. Broadcast: Wednesday 25 July 2012

Humans are social animals: relationships are critical to our wellbeing. Indeed, a lack of face-to-face contact can put our health at risk. This panel, investigating ideas put forward in the Grattan Institute's Social Cities report, looks at ways to make cities better places to live by increasing our opportunities to connect with other people. This panel, hosted by Peter Mares, examines how the design and functioning of a city -- from transport networks to the availability of parks and sporting grounds to the architecture of public spaces and buildings -- can help bring people together or keep them apart. It shows that even modest and inexpensive changes, such as installing benches at the edge of a public area or converting an unused lot into a 'pocket park', can make urban spaces more welcoming.

See: *The Conversation on Loneliness on the rise as our cities atomise* <http://theconversation.edu.au/loneliness-on-the-rise-as-our-cities-atomise-6068>

The Rise of Cities

[Ed] we thought the following article by RICHARD DOBBS, JAANA REMES [SEPT/OCT 2012 was very interesting so have edited it for the newsletter]

If there's any bright spot in an otherwise dim outlook for the global economy, it's the rise of cities. With fragile growth in Europe and the United States, the shift in economic balance toward the East and South is happening with unprecedented speed and scale -- and it's happening through urbanization. Quite simply, we are witnessing the biggest economic transformation the world has ever seen as the populations of cities in emerging markets expand and see their incomes rise as never before, producing massive geopolitical shifts and a wave of new consumers whose spending power will change the way the world shops and invests.

More than ever, cities matter.

Today, just 600 urban centers generate about 60 percent of global GDP. But though 600 cities will continue to account for the same share of global GDP in 2025, this elite group will have a very different membership. Over the next 15 years, the urban world's center of gravity will move farther south and, even more decisively, east.

Which is why we've put together this unique index of The Most Dynamic Cities of 2025, some 40 percent of which are in just one country: China...

The Most Dynamic Cities of 2025

Of course, the big cities of today -- the New Yorks and Tokyos, Londons and Chicagos -- are, without a doubt, still giants....

Fast-forward to 2025, though, and one-fourth of these developed-market cities will no longer make the top 600.

By 2025, 99 new cities are expected to enter the top 600, all from the developing world and overwhelmingly -- 72 new cities -- from China. ...

China's urbanization is thundering along at an extraordinary pace; it's happening at 100 times the scale of the world's first country to urbanize -- Britain -- and at 10 times the speed.

Over the past decade alone, China's share of people living in large cities has increased from 36 percent to nearly 50 percent. In 2010, China's metropolitan regions accounted for 78 percent of its GDP...

See: Building a Better China http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/08/13/building_a_better_china

Projecting the evolution of cities is an inherently fraught business. The destinies of metropolises vary widely depending on the wisdom of their leaders, broad economic trends, the success of local business endeavors, and, of course, luck. So sure, real estate bubbles may burst and China's torrid growth rates may return to Earth, but across a range of macroeconomic scenarios, whether growth is slower or faster, our findings on patterns of urban growth hold: Barring some unforeseen disaster, the future of the world's cities will largely be written in Chinese.

The 10 most dynamic cities of 2025 are:

Shanghai
Beijing
Tianjin
São Paulo
Guangzhou
Shenzhen
New York
Chongqing
Moscow
Tokyo



Shanghai by night

The Sustainable Communities Plan

http://theplan.sustainablehouse.com.au/assets/docs/TheSustainableCommunitiesPlan_MMobbs_2011.pdf

Welcome to *The Plan*, a free guide to making a city suburb more environmentally sustainable through a series of community-led projects. The Plan is set in [Chippendale, Sydney, Australia](#), but is being used to guide innovation around the world. Before you take the ideas you find here and put them into action in your city, help us make it happen where it all began in Chippendale.

The Plan was developed by Michael Mobbs, sustainability coach, lawyer and author. It's part common sense design, part council policy guide and firstly an approachable study of how a suburb impacts our planet.

By retrofitting its buildings and streets to reduce summer heat, lower dangerous air and water pollution, and save money for food, energy and water, massive gains can be won.

- Human health can skyrocket.
- Participating businesses and residents may save over \$3 million in food, energy and water bills in the first three years

of the Plan.

- The Plan trials proven ways to: grow food; use rain and the sun's energy; walk and bicycle safely on roads; and end waste.
- The Plan seeks a joint effort between Council and the community based on honesty, mutual respect and partnership.

And here are some comments about The Plan:

"I think the current proposal for a sustainable Chippendale as proposed by Michael Mobbs is a wonderful idea and this is the most relevant and suitable suburb for such an experiment ... I think it is important to find innovative ways to reduce the negative impacts of the cars and pollution."

Janet Laurence, Artist, Studio in Chippendale

"I look forward to seeing the results of experiments that can only be useful in establishing more sociable and less wasteful ways of our all living together."

David Malouf, Author, Chippendale Resident

Whether we like it or not, human-induced climate change is a reality. Over 2000 United Nations' scientists unanimously agree: urgent worldwide action is needed to reduce the damage we've done. And it must happen by 2015. The Sustainable Streets and Community Plan (Chippendale) creates a positive vision to address the damage, a way forward for suburbs in Australia and around the world. It's a plan for village life: for art, conversations, silence and contemplation in the streets, the park, for more jobs and businesses, for more walking, cycling, and local art, food, trees, plants, birds, insects, less water and energy consumed, and less waste.

Moving forward in Christchurch (edited from an article by Paul Downton)

On Saturday 21st July more than 100 people gathered in Christchurch to spend the day taking part in an “integrated sustainable design workshop” to explore ideas and generate proposals “to create a vibrant urban village, an innovative and inspiring example of sustainable design and connected community”.

The night before, many of the participants had attended a series of presentations that set the tone and laid out the general goals of what it might mean to develop a sustainable urban village on an inner city urban block. I was there to make a couple of presentations and steer the workshop and was invited by Jane Quigley and the newly incorporated Viva! group.



The event drew upon an army of skilled volunteers and technical experts including architects, engineers, landscape architects, students and sustainability professionals.

The workshopers were introduced to a series of key ideas and approaches to sustainable design, including the Living Building Challenge, a radical approach to ecologically and socially responsible design that is increasingly gaining international influence and acceptance.

I laid great stress on the idea that the project was about designing in the context of the larger urban system of the city – but working particularly at the scale of the neighbourhood. Even at the scale of just a handful of buildings it is both possible and necessary to think in terms of making convivial places for people to enjoy daily life in all parts of their environment, not just inside buildings. Outdoor spaces are essential to enabling and encouraging the spontaneous magic of community to take place.

I used Christie Walk as an example of how that translates into practice.

Cardboard, urban fractals and pocket neighbourhoods

The Saturday morning began with some brief presentations to orientate the participants to their job for the day – to design a sustainable urban village!

But the workshop tools included fresh ways of thinking about development that people could relate to, in particular, I introduced the concept of an ‘urban fractal’ – in which every neighbourhood scale part of the city is developed as a piece of the whole city as people wish to see it, and ‘pocket neighbourhoods’ – a concept from US architect Ross Chapin that builds development around small communities of around 10 to 20 dwellings sharing a central space and facilities.

A consistently positive atmosphere held sway and the workshopers rose to the challenge of this crash course in sustainable urban design. The whole exercise was a testament to the power of community.

The next phase is to use the inputs from the workshop to synthesise an integrated, coherent design concept proposal that can be taken forward by the private sector, government and/or partnerships for urban village developments as part of the rebuilding of Christchurch.

A Case study: Peterborough Village

I spent most of the following two days working with Di Lucas and her team on workshoping ideas for the ‘Peterborough Village’. Once again, this is a community-based initiative, driven by the energy of people determined to restore their city using models based on community and sustainability.

This was a smaller, more intimate exercise, but just as energetic. The idea was to take the area around Peterborough Road in Christchurch and look at redeveloping all the sites chronically damaged by earthquakes in a way that created a series of pocket neighbourhoods that, collectively, would become ‘Peterborough Village’.

It was a successful workshop and there are now people determined to turn their visions into reality, using the model of pocket neighbourhoods as the basis for designing and developing the sites.

Paul Downton 17 August 2012

Transition to Resilience T2R

The intentions of this Alliance are to bring together the expertise of the participating European organisations for lifelong education in the field of social, economical and ecological sustainability.

The Alliance is promoting a 2-year learning journey, Transition to Resilience, T2R, to support those who work in local government, NGO’s and the community in the creation of sustainable living environments, both urban and rural. This course works towards empowering community creativity in setting up projects for sustainability (building community in cities, setting up Transition Town Initiatives, CO2-reduction programs, energy self-reliance in bioregions, fostering rural urban village networks etc.)

The Alliance develops intelligent design integrating the wisdom gained from existing experience into a whole. The two year long flexible course-design is interspersed with practical experience that the participants gain through setting up their own sustainable projects (Action Learning).

http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/grundtvig_en.htm

Are planning and building regulations keeping up with the climate-changing times?

This has come up in conversations with people who live in apartment blocks and others who have had their gardens and rooftops overshadowed by new buildings nearby.

In one case the apartments had been designed to 'high environmental criteria' and yet residents were not provided with outdoor drying space for washing and, initially, were forbidden to put washing on their balconies. That rule was later changed so they could hang items below the sight line of their balcony railing.

Other apartments are forbidden by their strata by-laws from even putting a towel to air on the back of a balcony chair! The result which is the 'norm' in South Australia is that every apartment ends up with an electric dryer which is probably used throughout the year.

With more apartments being built, the implications for energy consumption are huge. So, a high financial cost to householders paying their bill, a high financial cost to everyone paying taxes to provide the electricity, and more greenhouse gas emissions.

Then there is the private car which it's assumed that everyone must have and therefore every new development must have at least one parking space for each apartment. For city developments the result is huge excavations and tonnes of concrete, one of the biggest sources of greenhouse gas emissions. There is also a financial cost which is added to the price of the apartment.

The big one though is the overshadowing of PV panels. This is becoming a big issue as prices for electricity rise and governments scramble to keep up with demand. There appears to be little that can be done to stop a neighbor or a developer from building something that will overshadow the panels and wipe out one's PV electricity generation for the rest of time.

Some suggestions:

1. Make it compulsory for apartment developers to provide outdoor drying areas and/or balcony lines built-in for hanging washing. In Canada at least one province has passed a law preventing this by-law being used.

Result: reductions in electricity bills and greenhouse gases.

2. Drastically reduce the number of car-parking spaces and make a commercial car-share scheme a compulsory feature of every new city development. The developer would save on the cost of construction and so could provide free membership of car-share for a couple of years and lower the selling price of some apartments.

Result: lower prices of apartments, lower costs to developers, less cars on city streets (surveys of car-share have shown that members use public transport more often when the cost of using a car is more obvious).

3. When PV's are approved for installation there should be a guarantee that nothing will be approved later which will overshadow the panels.

Result: less greenhouse gases and a reduction in anger towards local and state governments!

What do you think? Please let me know if the above suggestions seem reasonable.

Margaret Rohde